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SUBJECT: GUINEA'S ELECTION PILOT COMMITTEE BEGINS WORK

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. The piloting committee for the upcoming legislative elections met for the first time on Thursday, September 13. The government provided a budget and partial schedule for pre-election activities. The Interior Minister requested more money to fund voter registration and elections, but was unable to provide a firm date for elections. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) On September 13, Econoff attended the first meeting of the Committee de Pilotage (elections steering committee.) The committee was formed to provide a forum for the government and its partners (United Nations (UN), European Union (EU), USA, and Japan) to monitor voter registration and organization of the next legislative elections. (Voter registration and the elections themselves will be conducted by an independent elections committee known locally as the CENI.)

¶3. (SBU) The piloting committee is chaired by the Mamadou Beau Keita, Minister of Interior and Security, and includes Ousmane Dore, the Minister of Finance, Justin Morel Junior, the Minister of Communications, Abdoul Kabele Camara, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Paulette Kourouma, Minister of Justice. However, at this first meeting, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Finance were not in attendance.

¶4. (SBU) The partners attending this first committee meeting were the EU, the UN, Japan and the U.S.

¶5. (SBU) Minister Keita provided budget figures for the election. (Exchange rate: 4000 GnF/1\$)

Total Electoral Budget: 79,884,122,020 FG (\$19,971,028.00);

Voter registration: 41,377,007,560 FG (\$10,344,251.00);

Organization of the elections: 38,507,114,460 FG (\$9,626,778.00).

Guinea's contribution: 15 billion FG (\$3,750,000.00).

¶6. (SBU) Interior Minister Keita also released schedules for some pre-election preparation, but explicitly refused to specify a firm date for the elections. He stated that it was impossible to select a date at this time due to the unknown delivery date for computers needed for pre-election activities. He was also unable to specify a date for the next meeting of the steering committee.

¶7. (SBU) The Interior Minister announced that the political parties have agreed on the designation of their two remaining members (out of ten) to the independent elections committee (CENI) and had promised to send the list to his Ministry by September 14.

¶8. (SBU) Finally, M. Keita requested for the holding of another donor's conference to accelerate the mobilization of financial resources for the elections. He concluded by repeating his Ministry's commitment to organize free and democratic elections whose results will be accepted by all.

¶9. (SBU) The UN representative, Ms. MBaranga, stated her

satisfaction with the progress already accomplished. However, she also expressed her concerns as to the enormous tasks lying ahead, and the expectations of the population for this process, so important for Guinea's political future.

¶10. (SBU) COMMENT. The whisper date for elections had slipped from December to January, and now appears drifting towards March 2008. The schedule provided at the meeting has built-in some pre-election voter registration preparations for December, so conducting the election would still be some way off. The good news is that a budget and partial financing are in place, and the holding of fair and transparent elections has the attention of the government. Furthermore, the completion of the nominations to the CENI removes a major obstacle to election preparation. Meanwhile, this piloting committee will provide the partners with regular, direct access to the election decision-makers to communicate their concerns. What is yet to be seen is Guinea's commitment (and ability) to follow through on their plans. The government knows the right words to say, the question becomes will they put those words into action.
END COMMENT.

BROKENSHERE